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REV. FRANK MASON NORTH, D.D.

There Is No Substitute for the Missionary Passion:

A STUDY OF THE PRESENT SITUATION
IN THE UNITED STATES

By

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The title carries both the thesis and the conclusion. There will be found in this paper no subtle approaches to an unexpected finding. The discussion deals wholly with the present missionary situation in the United States. It is written by way of information and reminder, and assumes from beginning to end that in writing the topic I have stated an axiom. If in other parts of the world there are further illustrative facts they would be pertinent to the theme but are not included in the present review.

The surface phenomenon with which we are painfully impressed in America—the reference is wholly to the United States—is the diminishing of what might be called missionary momentum. The Churches have long been accustomed to a minimum interest in foreign missions and from the zero point or starting line have rejoiced in a steady, if gradual, increase in resources for their work in other lands and in the closer integration of that ‘beyond-the-horizon’ enterprise with the near-by program of

the Churches. The impulses which have created the growing force and volume have in later years ceased to be spasmodic and have so deepened and broadened both in source and output that the Churches have reckoned upon maintenance if not acceleration of motion, upon undiminished if not abundant sympathy and resources.

Just previous to the world war, and during its earlier years, opportunity in practically all mission fields sharpened the urgency of appeal. The leaders of every mission board were alert and their constituencies expectant. The celebration of the Centenary of the Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church, which occurred in 1919, was planned on a most generous scale. The other so-called benevolent boards of the Church were brought into a common appeal and action. The world-wide organization was stirred to its outermost rim. On a five-year basis a total subscription of over a hundred and ten millions of dollars was reported, of which in total fifty-two million five hundred thousand dollars, or ten million five hundred thousand dollars a year for five years, were assigned to the Board of Foreign Missions. This did not include the amount raised annually by the Woman's Foreign Missionary Society of the Church, which in the five years' period would be between eleven and twelve millions of dollars. Stimulated, at least to some extent, by the purpose and plans of the Methodist Episcopal Church, the denomination in the United States numerically the largest, whose missionary Centenary was the

occasion of its endeavour, all the other important missionary bodies organized with enthusiasm for larger programs both in giving and expending. That the widespread and generous spirit of altruism which characterized the period of the war contributed very largely both to the courage and the consecration of the Christian people of America in their missionary enterprise is a recognized phase of the psychology of the movement.

In the midst of these enlarged programs of the foreign mission boards—programs which in each of the larger communions included the other church boards, the Inter-church World Movement was launched. It aimed to be, and, in its organization was, an inclusive movement. All phases of the organized activities of the several denominations were invited into participation. The surveys of opportunities and agencies covered the entire country and reached out, in a measure, into foreign mission fields. The bigness of the design at the centre was felt to the limit of the circumference. Hopes that had been stimulated and, perhaps, disappointed in the individual denominational movements, were quickened and expanded by this tremendous ideal of a united effort of all the Church forces. Both in America and on the foreign field may be found the estimates and charts of the undertakings which it was confidently believed this mighty movement would make possible. The ideal was noble. The purpose was sincere. The assemblage of forces was extraordinary. The logic of the strategy was sound. There

are, it is true, those who hold that the movement did not escape the illusions of grandeur either at its center or in some of its more remote units. But no one who was close enough to see its idealism and the personal forces which were promoting it can fail, if he be fair-minded, to recognize in it one of the most superb attempts in the history of the Church to lift her program out of the small circles into the great ones and to give to latent forces everywhere believed in, but nowhere fully trusted, their legitimate scope and power. In its larger purposes the Interchurch World Movement failed. It failed honourably. But its failure shook the confidence of the Churches to the remotest hamlet and dampened everywhere the emerging enthusiasm of the people whatever their denominational loyalty might be.

There were, at first, in the period we are reviewing, large increases in the contributions for foreign missions. The channels were deepened, but, relatively, the actual streams are lower. The struggle of the missionary boards during the three years past to maintain the larger program and in some instances even to hold recession at the former levels is grave if not alarming.

At this point it is pertinent to say a word about the missionary leadership in these years of test. As one whose executive responsibilities, at his own desire, have been lessened, I may be permitted to express the opinion that no stronger men have ever been entrusted with major tasks than are those who are now directing the affairs of

the great missionary organizations, many of whom have for many years past borne the burden which the Churches have placed upon them. The names of some are familiar to the rulers of nations and are known in the legislative halls of the world. Many of them are cosmopolitan in their experience and frequently compare notes, from personal knowledge, touching the remoter places of the earth. Without exception they are honoured in the influential circles of their respective denominations and are reckoned as citizens of the first rank in the communities where they live. They are, for the most part, broad-minded, in the development of the missionary policies of their own Churches, and nowhere and at no time has there been a stronger fellowship in high service than has existed among them for the past decade. In the memories of over two score years, during which by rather close observation and by many most valued personal contacts the spirit and capacity of the missionary leaders of our American Churches have been appraised, there is no record of an excellence to which the leaders of the decade past must be assigned a second place. On the other hand, while in devotion to their tasks they have found in their predecessors men whom they might emulate but not excel, in their comprehension of the issues involved in the missionary enterprise, in their alertness in meeting opportunity, in their unreserved fellowship in co-operation with one another and in their initiative under unexpected appeals they are unsurpassed by any who at any time have

led the missionary forces of the Churches.

Facts are irritating, especially when they are in the realm of finance. The pessimist welcomes them even though he can be gloomy without them; the optimist would be glad to ignore them, but they are stubborn, and—however cheerfully, bless him!—he must deal with them. The facts for the mission boards are, as already indicated, that incomes have surprisingly fallen, and that the real cause for the decline has not yet been fully disclosed. As this is written, one of the most important communions in council is considering the adjustment of its budget for next year to a loss of twelve hundred thousand dollars. We add, with gratitude, that the great Convention has made most generous pledges to meet the decline. The board which makes the largest contribution to foreign missions is working under a reduction to its fields, throughout the world, of 40 per cent. Another board, in the very front rank for liberality and devotion, found itself last year with but 70 to 75 per cent of its expected income. Registering a welcome recovery this present year, another board recalls that two years ago it was obliged to order a reduction of 25 per cent in its field work. A study of the incomes of several boards indicates not only the drop in income for the two or three years past, but in a longer period a much slower growth of income for foreign missions than for the other benevolent undertakings of the Churches. The lines which by diagram show the growth of the Churches' annual invest-

ment for local purposes, that is, what the individual Churches spend upon themselves, as compared with the contribution of the same Churches for foreign missions, suggest nothing more apt than the race between the hare and the tortoise. The striking fact is that among the larger communions there seems to be no exception to this deplorable trend. One is forced by these figures to think in terms of general causes, or of some one cause, which produces the common effect.

It is impossible to leave a financial statement just here. To the record of what it is, follows inevitably the question—why is it? The lack of dollars or of pounds means much in itself, as missionary folk on both sides of the sea—indeed on the shores of all the seven seas—in these days know. But the implications throng about the fact and refuse to be excluded. Does the fall in income indicate the poverty of the people? Is it due to bad method? Does it tell a story of loss of faith? Is it one of several symptoms which indicate spiritual break-down? Is it contagious or likely to become chronic, or is it curable? This would not have been written for the sake of announcing that the mission boards in the United States are short of funds. The real inducement was not the opportunity to state a fact but to say some things about it. To these we now come. They are here written not as data for discussion, not as causes of a lamentable situation, not as explanation of a group of facts, but as matters which belong in any survey of the conditions under which the

missionary forces in the United States are striving to carry on.

There is a great deal of money in America, more *per capita* than ever before. It was never more widely distributed. There is a remarkable increase in savings banks deposits. The production of automobiles and their use would be astounding were we not so familiar with the phenomena of the gas and of the wheel. Organization of business shows constant expansion. It is offset, in part, of course, by failures. Normally, unemployment is reduced to a minimum. Prices have not returned to the pre-war level—in the region of New York City they are between 70 and 80 per cent above the level of 1914. But wages are very high. As is universally the case, it is the salaried class—clerks and professional men—who feel the financial strain. If the channels of missionary money show low water, it is not because there is not plenty of water. Other channels are bank full and some overflow—in waste and in the destruction of the roads and the crops.

The idealism of the people of the United States has been sadly, we believe not permanently, shocked. One who shared in the enthusiasm for co-operation in a war that was to prevent war, who felt the urge of the altruism of the men of the street, of the shop, of the counting-house, of the school, of the Church for a spirited, unselfish world service, needs no demonstration of the disaster to the morale of the nation which came when the

nation's leadership went into opposition and a generous co-operation gave place to the bicker and barter and bargaining of politics. To know the truth he has only to take account of his own reactions. When the forward march of America's soul was checked, and bivouac and retreat took the place of advance, the new appraisal of other nations began and a new attitude toward the world became painfully familiar. Race antagonisms with many have deepened. A wholly needless shadow rests upon our relations with Japan. 'One hundred per cent American'—some of them born outside of the United States, and not natives of Canada either—became prominent. Organizations, some of them secret, set themselves against 'foreigners.' It is seldom asserted, but it is a fact, that insidious prejudice against foreigners, Asian or European, is permeating many communities. To this there is no check in law, and custom counts often for it and not against it. The difficulty of appraising this influence is at once apparent. It prevails, of course, chiefly in the Protestant section of the population—the group from which our mission resources are drawn. One may easily overstress its importance. It may also be overlooked or underestimated. In any case it belongs to the data we are considering.

A factor in the situation, in this case wholly within the Churches, is not yet in such perspective as to reward exact examination. Yet in the intimate conversations of the administrative officers of the boards it has an impor-

tant, if not a major, place. The development in any communion of a larger program for foreign missions inevitably touches the interests of other boards of the denomination. The appeal for larger contributions for work beyond the horizon has in no case failed to arouse the concern of those responsible for the work on the hither side of it. The facts of the situation are not always clearly seen. While a half dozen home base societies, home missions, church erection, Sunday schools, education, clerical pensions and the like, all in friendliest contact with the home Churches, care for the interest indicated in the home land, one society cares for the like interests in the foreign fields. Yet that society or board is reckoned as just one unit among all the rest. The growing purpose to meet the problems at home has the highest commendation of all students of missions. The demands of new types of work increase the claims for funds and the perplexity of organization. In the interest of peace and the reduction of the number of appeals to the same constituency the united appeal and the budget system have been quite generally adopted. The result has been, in many cases, the reduction of income as well as of appeals. Built into a system of percentages the amount available, if the budget is raised, is relatively small. A foreign board which had formerly received over 50 per cent of the Church's giving for benevolent purposes, now has 36 per cent. The increase in its income is conditional upon the lifting of the total income.

Individuals who would gladly give for special objects, desiring to be loyal to the Church's plan and to secure for the local Church credit upon its quota, hesitate and suppress the impulse to larger generosity. Congregations contribute toward the budget. They escape the specific offering for foreign missions and also the education and stimulus that the presentation would bring. It is hard to give colour to the 'benevolent budget.' Ever have there been fascination and mystery in the lands afar. It is a question whether logic is a sufficient substitute for imagination. When foreign missions come to be thought of in direct connexion with the business of the Church, with those familiar organizations which, however important, really make appeal to individual or community self-interest, the picture has lost some of its colour. In large measure the united appeal gets its strength from the foreign mission element in it. To adopt the united appeal seemed to be good business and high strategy. To find the least common denominator of a dozen boards, foreign missions being one, and to work the Church's benevolent program by that has seemed good mathematics, but there are those in every communion where it has been tried who suspect that the foreign mission unit in the group suffers irreparable loss. This, it will be said, is a matter of machinery. Granted. But a defective mechanism lessens and mars the product. The way of escape for foreign missions is being sought. It has not yet been found.

The mission fields were never before so near us as in the last five years. A new disposition for communication has been developed and the technique for its expression is marvellous. Russia, China, South Africa, Japan, India, begin the day with us. What they think of us measures well up in the column with what we think of them. Men from our schools, our trade centres, our pulpits, have been visiting the foreign fields. The available opinion on foreign affairs, including missions, is vastly increased. Mission administration—with the increases in capital investment and personnel—has become big business. Wise and experienced men concern themselves with it. Often they bring to the boards and executive officers large reinforcement. It is sometimes awkward when they present themselves as qualified experts after ten hours or so in a given field or after a casual glance at an annual report which contains a thousand items. But the boards are agents of the Churches and all the members of the Church form the constituency. The boards' decisions, as to policy, program, personnel, affect thousands of individuals. Enthusiasm, optimism, programs (with a balance), expenditure (with a margin of safety), policy (on a rising income), induce little comment. When reaction comes, as in the period now under our discussion, discontent as to procedure and views as to what ought or ought not to have been done are to be expected. When brought to focus where responsible administrators can interpret or modify, there is little harm. Expressed or urged where

no information or correction can be given, they often become foci for the contagion of ignorance and prejudice, the range of which cannot easily be determined. When one adds to this the new phases of thinking to which national attitudes such as those revealed in India and China and Russia force all thoughtful men, it is not difficult to suspect that missionary motive may be dulled and expansion in giving may be temporarily restricted. If national Churches are sufficient unto themselves, why help them? If in foreign mission lands the man from the West is not wanted, why go? Voices, then, are heard which do not come from the mountain-side in Galilee. What would have been the Master's answer had Peter, or Thomas perhaps, asked 'Shall we go and disciple nations which do not bid us come?'

One further fact must go into this record. Restlessness in the theological phases of the life of the Churches in America has afforded no little amusement to the unco' wise on both sides of the sea, but the humour of it is its least important element. The Dayton episode would be negligible and Scopes forgotten were it not for the strong cross currents upon which they were but bits of flotsam and jetsam. That the great communions of America are doomed to continued and weakening disorder because of essential theological differences probably few of their leaders and none of their rank and file believe. But suspicion even casually expressed deepens into distrust. Intolerance inevitably breeds hatred, or what would be

hatred if the modern temper were not on the whole so amiable. To shake even inadequate foundations is perilous if those resting upon them have no guidance as to the processes for strengthening them, or have no idea that good granite lies just at hand. After all, it is this same old sinner, Intolerance, which is the star performer in the *mêlée* to-day. Extremists who are unable to put themselves in any other man's place are equally disturbing whether Fundamentalists or Modernists. There is seen, not infrequently, a strange anomaly—an extreme liberal excessively and most disagreeably intolerant, and, on the other hand, a devoted and highly spiritualized fundamentalist who quite certainly never heard of the milk of human kindness, or, at least, has left it unused so long that it has gone sour. The open discussion of these theological differences has appeared, to a greater or less extent, in the great assemblies of several of the larger denominations. The chief injury to the missionary program has not been, however, in the fair conflict in the open, but in the more subtle ways of small literature, small talk and the propaganda of insinuation. To a large extent this goes unanswered. The integrity of missionary opinion and devotion has been assailed. Absurd suggestions of the heterodoxy of missionary leaders both at home and abroad have been whispered. Agencies which are outside of the Churches and which, since they represent no formal constituency, are free to put the accent upon some special doctrine or some peculiar method of

administration, divert support from the more regular societies. The discontent of pious ignorance and the impatience of a secular spirit find in the present unsettled thought of the country a not unwelcome occasion for withholding and for criticism. That these phenomena are little more than appearances, and that they are not symptoms, many are glad to believe. That the springs of beneficence, especially towards the unseen people far away, have felt the influence of a dry season and have been running low, can hardly be denied. That the conditions are permanent, I, for one, do not believe.

And now, per contra. The annual contributions for foreign missions far exceed those of seven and eight years ago. There were never so many missionaries on the field. The world over, the range of activity has widened. The zeal of our young people for service abroad has not slackened though it is creating new channels for expression. Recruits ever exceed budgets. Wise men and women steadily and undismayed are examining the technique of administration with a view to simplicity, economy and efficiency. Their work is not good material for publicity and little is heard of them, but the results of their patience in invention and of their fund of experience will be found all along the line. The missionary leaders of the day have given good evidence of their vigour and vitality. Prompt utterances, powerful and far-reaching, have gone to interested governments and to the missionary forces in China. They ask that, in the

revision of the treaties, missionaries be relieved both of the protection and the handicap of special rights, and that the steps toward the abolition of extra-territoriality be speeded up. The missionary movement may have lost momentum but the missionary mind is keen; it has lost neither purpose nor edge.

Many will recall the days when we said, 'There is a silent America.' It spoke not uncertainly in the period of spiritual idealism when the world war brought its challenge and its test. There is a silent American Church. There is often life where there is no speech. Tens of millions of church members write nothing for the press, and are heard neither in the council room nor on the platform. To action wide and sweeping the right voice ever stirs them. Millions of them do not give to foreign missions, but millions of them do. It is not candid to stress the one without stressing the other. One of the boards reports between fifteen and twenty thousand individuals concerned in intelligent giving to specific objects. Literature, it is believed, in greater volume and in more effective form than ever before reaches the people—the daily press, the religious press, Sunday school journals, special periodicals, tracts, booklets, church bulletins, manifolded field letters, children's stories, books of history, of adventure and of devotion. The hundreds of thousands of women in the women's missionary societies and departments have relaxed neither in their faith nor in their enterprise. The outstanding fact, after all, is

that there is in this vast church fellowship of believers in Jesus Christ a spiritual force that cannot be repressed. False ideas must be rebuked and cleared away. Many years ago Canon Fremantle wrote a great book to which he gave the title, *The World the Subject of Redemption*. The notion seems to prevail in some quarters that the world is the subject of, let us say, education, or reform, or civilization. Confidence must rest not upon some skillful contrivance but upon the Divine Man. This is not a contest of cult with cult. Our concern is not preaching to men about something whose chief merit lies in its being better than that which they have. Here is something outside of "churchizing" the multitudes. Here are a life, a cross, a tomb, a resurrection—the redemption of men from sin, infinite compassion for their weakness and sorrow, victory over death, eternal life. Here and there men act as though our Leader had left the field, or that what He did nineteen hundred years ago ended His part of it, and that the rest is our overwhelming task with Him away and not caring. Is the Gospel of a Living Christ a new Gospel in our generation? Does the motive which moved the missionary heroes of the early days—the constraining love of Christ—seem too personal, too intimate, for a highly organized Christianity? Would the effort once again to fan into flame the missionary passion serve a purpose which the cultivation of a missionary intelligence and a missionary conscience leaves incomplete? Frankly, 'out of the depths,' and out of the buffetings of

the cross currents of modern experience, many in America are crying unto Him—this Living Lord. They believe that ‘there is no other name.’ They discredit no organization, they decry no program, they would honour and arouse the Church, but just now, with breaking hearts, they are asking for the vision of Him—the Christ who Lives. They believe in the throb as well as in the science of missions. They urge for themselves and for others that the warmth of a fervent spirit may go with the cool thinking of a clear brain.

There is no substitute for the Missionary Passion.

The burning heart of our compassion for the multitudes must be our Passion for Jesus Christ.

It was the compelling power in the first century. The twentieth has found for it no substitute.



